THE RETURN

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THE RETURN

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A leader comes! Let loud huzzas
Burst from the extended line.

THE RETURN

I SEE the great Dome of the Invalides and under it the beautiful sarcophagus at which all men gaze in wonder and humility; but the massive syenite covering has moved aside, the casket within is open, it is empty.

I see a little man in a gray cloak at the entrance to the office of the President and I hear him demand admittance.

He passes in; the President asks his wish.

"I wish to save France."

"And who are you, to save France?"

"I am myself. Once I served the French people, as soldier, as Consul, as their Emperor."

"And how may I know you are he of whom you speak?"

"Mr. President, look at me!"

His voice seemed the voice of God and godlike power shone from his eyes.

The President knelt.

"Sire!"

"Call me not 'sire'. I have learned how false my dream of empire. Not again will I be Emperor."

"What title will you have?"

"Only the title given me by my soldiers on the field of victory, my dearest,

proudest name, the 'Little Corporal'."

"And how will you save France?"

"At the head of her armies."

"And will armies obey a corporal?"

"You shall see. I know what has been done, what not done, and that without me France will be crushed, and soon. Write."

And the President wrote:

"Soldiers fighting for France, I am sending as your chief the Little Corporal—he will have no other name—who comes in this dark hour to save France. Soldiers, marvel not but obey."

I see a train moving as a flame of light, bearing the Little Corporal to the hard pressed armies.

I hear his commands:

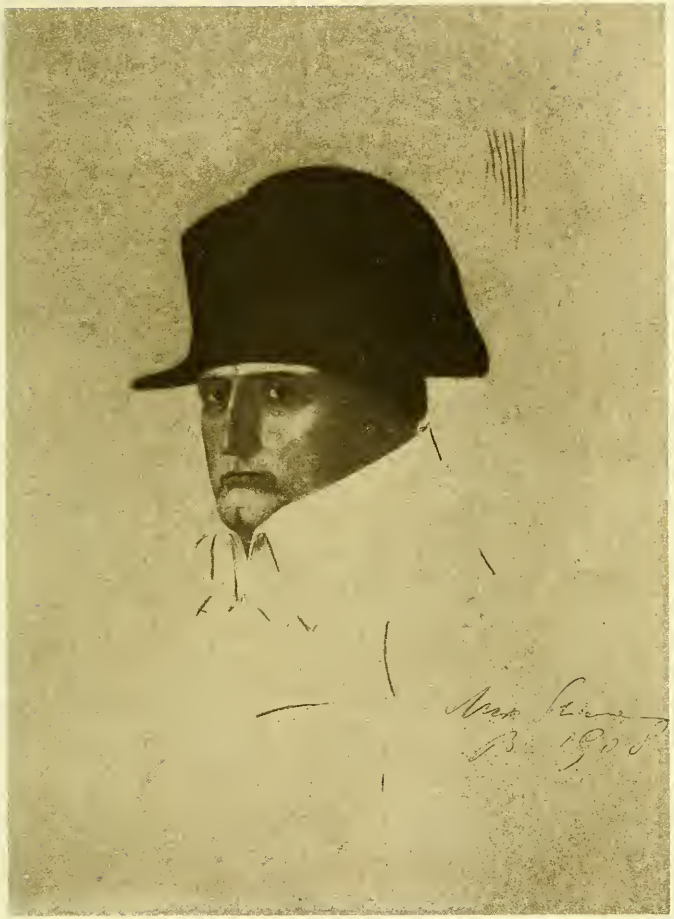
"General Joffre, direct

the defense of Paris.

"General Pau, you remind me of Stengel; but draw your troops from Alsace, secure the border and join General French.

"General French, you fight as Wellington fought me. You have done well. Continue.

"Soldiers, I wear the sword of Austerlitz. Behold it, the Sword of Victory!"



I hear as one voice, "Live the Little Corporal", a shout that seems to reach the stars, so great the German pauses, fearing new armies.

Well may you listen, well may you pause, proud and boastful man; for now the men you fight are led by the Master of Victory.

I watch while new dispositions are made, as the Little Corporal directs.

I hear in all lands from all free men a joyous cry, "The Little Corporal fights for France."

I see the coming of armies—from the cold northland, from burning Asian plains, from the sands of Africa, and from that Island Realm whose peoples all are free.

The Little Corporal disposes all.

I see long days of blood

and death and the Little Corporal has the victory.

Day follows day, and the German horde rolls back, northward, northward, through Amiens, past Lille, over the border, pursued ever by the Little Corporal.

At fated Mons and Charleroi again through days and nights men fight and die, these for Freedom, those for Empire.

I see the German ranks waver, break and fly.

Their envoy comes, asking peace. The Little Corporal answers, "Tell your false War Lord I will make peace at Berlin, a peace that will last." And his armies cry their battle word, "On to Berlin."

Retreat, pursuit, continue.

At Waterloo the rolling mists take fearsome

shapes, of men long dead, the French who fought there, the Guard in serried rank, Cambronne, the horsemen led by Ney, the Emperor.

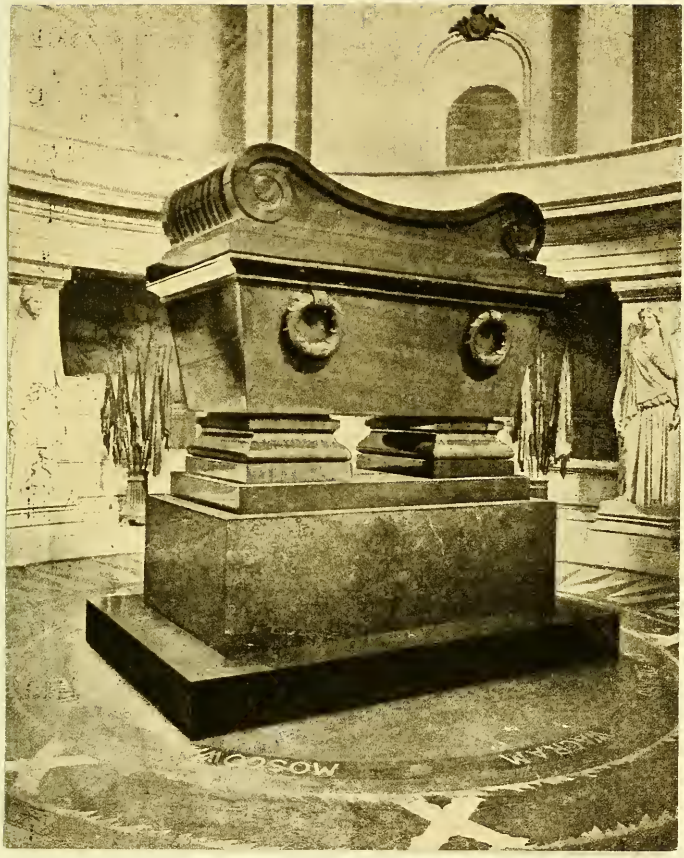
No rock-like Wellesley can stay these, no Blucher's aid avail. In panic fright the German flies this awesome field.

At last Berlin. From the Imperial Throne the Little Corporal speaks:

"No more the Kaiser wears a crown. The people rule. People of Germany, Soldiers of England, Soldiers of France, my work is done. Farewell."

I see again the Dome of the Invalides and the Great Tomb beneath. All is in place where he whom France so loved, who so loved France, lies in his quiet sleep.

San Francisco
August 25, 1914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